

not teaching that Christians refuse to speak to or try to influence those in error. It is, however, warning that our response to those in error must never be something that in any way communicates acceptance or fellowship with error. We cannot say to ourselves "I don't personally believe it—so cooperation with error doesn't promote it!" John says doing this causes one to share in **"evil deeds."**

As short as this epistle is, John makes it clear there is more he wanted to say but chose not to do so **"with paper and ink"** hoping that he would be able to **"speak face to face"** (12a). His **"face to face"** *epistle* (so to speak) surely brought even fuller rich teachings to these Christians causing their joy to **"be full"** (12b). The apostle ends by extending a greeting from **"the children of your elect sister"** (13). If the **"elect lady"** is an individual we may conclude from this that John was with the family of the sister of this unnamed Christian woman. If the **"elect lady"** refers figuratively to a congregation, her **"elect sister"** would be another congregation with whom John is working when the epistle was written. The New Testament records both individual greetings and those from one congregation to another. The latter seems most likely to me in this text. John urges the brethren in one congregation to faithfulness and extends a greeting from brethren in one place to those in another.

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BULLETIN OF THE OLSEN PARK CHURCH OF CHRIST
November 13, 2016

Faithful Sayings



Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM
10:00 AM
11:00 AM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Steve Dixon
Ryan Ferguson
Arend Gressley
Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott
Justin Smiley
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

"To the Elect Lady and Her Children"

By Kyle Pope

As it has traditionally been arranged, near the end of the New Testament there are three of the smallest books included in the inspired record. Two of these books were written by the apostle John. The first, which has come to be known as "Second John," has only thirteen verses, but is filled with important teachings that add to our understanding of service to God in Christ.

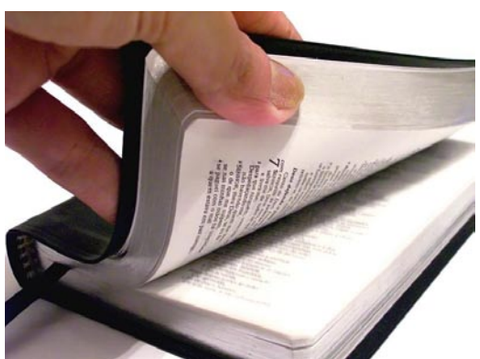
Like the third epistle of John, its sender is identified as **"The Elder"** (1a). It is generally believed that this was a humble way John (who was probably the only surviving apostle alive when this was written) identified himself. A unique feature of this short epistle is the unusual wording identifying its recipient. It is directed **"To the elect lady and her children"** (1b). This is generally understood in one of two ways: 1) The **"elect lady"** is an unidentified Christian woman whose children were also Christians. Or, 2) The **"elect lady"** is a figurative way of referring to a local church. In this explanation, reference to her **"children"** is a mixed metaphor referring to Christians within the congregation who are faithful to the Lord.

A good case can be made for either view. If this is an individual it makes it similar to Paul's letters to specific people such as Timothy, Titus, or Philemon. The assumption is that she is addressed because her husband was not a Christian, like Timothy's father (cf. Acts 16:1), or she was a widow (cf. 1 Tim. 5:3-16). If instead this is a figurative refer-

ence to the church it would match the figure Scripture paints of the church as the bride of Christ (cf. Eph. 5:23, 25-27; Rev. 21:9; 22:17). While the mixed metaphor of the church being both **"the elect lady"** collectively and **"her children"** individually is unusual, it would not be the first time the Holy Spirit used such mixed metaphors. In the book of Revelation (also penned by the apostle John) the church appears to be figured as a woman that gives birth to Christ (Rev. 12:5), but then faces persecution from Satan (Rev. 12:6, 13). Although she is preserved by God from Satan (Rev. 12:14), Satan continues to **"make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ"** (Rev. 12:17, NKJV). That is the same mixed metaphor a figurative interpretation of John's second epistle would employ. This leads me to lean toward a figurative interpretation.

After the initial greeting, John rejoices that he had **"found some of your children walking in truth"** (4). Most translations put the word **"some"** in italics to indicate that it is supplied by translators to complete the sense but is not directly in the text. The Greek uses the preposition *ek* (ἐκ), meaning "out of, from, by, away from" (Thayer), before the possessive phrase **"of your children."** John is referring to those *out of* her children, or thus **"some"** of her children. Not all Christians remain faithful to the Lord whether we are talking about the children of faithful Christians of members of any congregation of Christians. It is an encouragement, however, to others when fellow-soldiers continue in the spiritual battle.

John pleads with the woman and her faithful children to follow two commandments recorded in John's gospel: 1) The commandment which was **"from the beginning"** and not a **"new commandment"** that they should **"love one another"** (5). And, 2) True love means that one **"walks in His commandments"** (6). In his gospel, John recorded Jesus' words, **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another"** (John 13:34). The **"new"** aspect of this command likely addressed Jesus Himself. Human beings have always been commanded to love one another (cf. Lev. 19:18), but only in Christ's coming is His own love set forth as the ultimate example of love. Jesus says to love others **"as I have loved you."** John used the same wording in his first epistle describing the command given **"from the beginning"** (1 John 2:7). This suggests that in both epistles John is talking about the beginning of the gospel rather than the beginning of creation.



Olsen Park church of Christ

As in most of John's works, it seems clear that the apostle is forced to confront some type of false doctrine that denied the literal bodily coming of Christ **"in the flesh"** (7a; cf. John 1:14; 1 John 4:2-3). It is generally believed that this reflects the early stages of Gnostic beliefs—a heresy that would argue that the flesh was inherently evil and thus Christ only appeared to have come to earth. John calls any who would teach such **"a deceiver and an antichrist"** (7b). To avoid falling to such error he warns them to **"Look to yourselves"** (8a). Paul urged the Corinthians to **"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified"** (2 Cor. 13:5). John warns that giving themselves to such error would cause them to **"lose those things"** they had **"worked for"** and not receive a **"full reward"** (7b). It is commonly argued that a Christian cannot be lost having once been saved, but he or she can lose some measure of the **"full reward"** he or she would otherwise receive. John's words that follow refute this false idea. He writes: **"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son"** (9). If having accepted error that is contrary to the **"doctrine of Christ"** is an example of having lost what they had before, can one be said to **"not have God"** yet still be saved without a **"full reward"**? To lose the **"full reward"** is to lose the salvation that comes from the proper relationship with **"both the Father and the Son."**

Some have argued that John's emphasis is only on doctrines that deny something about the nature of Christ and not the doctrines revealed by Christ. It is true that the context specifically addresses error about Christ's **"coming in the flesh"** (7), but the phrase **"doctrine of Christ"** is not limited to only certain types of error. Jesus taught, **"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed"** (John 8:31). John has already defined true love as that which **"walks in His commandments"** (6). John does not teach that some doctrines are minor. The disciple of Christ must follow all of Jesus' teachings whether they were revealed during His time on earth or through the Holy Spirit to His apostles after His ascension (cf. John 14-16).

Not only must a Christian abide in **the doctrine of Christ"** but his or her own relationship to God can be influenced by how those teaching error are received. John writes, **"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds"** (10-11). Paul taught, **"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them"** (Rom. 16:17). This is not teaching rudeness. It is